

### 3. Needs Assessment

Statutory Requirements: Sections: 1112 (d) (1), 1114 (b) (1) (A), 1115 (a)

#### *Overview*

Needs assessment is a term that describes both the process that a Local Educational Agency (LEA) or district conducts to review overall needs in order to make decisions about the allocation of resources, including all ESEA funds, and work done at the school level to develop an educational plan or identify students to serve with Title I dollars. A comprehensive needs assessment is a planning tool that includes an analysis of broad concerns and issues facing the district or school related to academic achievement, other important student outcomes, and program priorities.

#### *Components of a Needs Assessment*

There is no single model or template for a needs assessment. Published materials exist that contain outlines for procedures and timelines that can be adapted based on the circumstances of a particular district or school. The general characteristics of a needs assessment are that the process include consideration of a wide variety of needs and issues, information is gathered from a variety of sources, valid and reliable data are used to the maximum extent possible, many individuals representing a wide variety of interests are meaningfully involved, the analysis results in the development of plans and goals, and the plans and goals are used as the basis for resource allocation. Ideally there should also be regular follow up and evaluation of the success of the plans and strategies.

A comprehensive needs assessment might include an analysis of:

- Student information such as achievement results, classroom work, attendance data, student transfer data, dropout data, language and ethnicity data, and gender data.
- Test results including results disaggregated by student group and test item analysis,
- School conditions including student access to books, supplies, and extended learning opportunities; numbers of full time teachers; class size; instructional dollars per pupil, supplementary grants and funds; support staff; technology available in the school; relevant curriculum; staff professional development opportunities; and governance and organization.
- Teacher data, including language fluency, experience, degrees, credentials, and special certification.
- School/family relationships, participation and satisfaction with the school and parent involvement in program planning and implementation, frequency of education and training, resources for training, frequency of contacts.
- Community information including poverty rates and other demographics; housing, employment, and business opportunities; protective, social, and public health services, services for homeless or migrant families; connections with tribal councils; and access to transportation and parks and recreation.

The Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS)—

<http://www.dpi.wi.gov/sig/improvement/index.html>—is one source of information about needs assessment tools and school improvement strategies.

## *District Level Needs Assessment*

The Title I law (section 1112 (d) (1)) requires that the district plan for use of Title I money be developed in consultation with teachers, principals, the administrators of other ESEA programs, other appropriate school personnel, and the parents of the children in Title I eligible schools. Federal regulations published in March 2002 also specify five major goals intended to be the focus of ESEA funds:

- By 2013-2014, all students will reach high standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- All limited English proficient students will become proficient in English and reach high academic standards, at a minimum attaining proficiency or better in reading/language arts and mathematics.
- By 2004-2005, all students will be taught by highly qualified teachers.
- All students will be educated in learning environments that are safe, drug free, and conducive to learning.
- All students will graduate from high school.

There is no single “right” way to conduct a district needs assessment. However, annual planning to meet the requirements related to development of the ESEA application should at least consider issues related to the five federal goals and any other high priority local goals being addressed with ESEA funds. The process must also include a wide variety of school and community representatives and can serve as one component of overall strategic planning.

## ***Needs Assessment for Schoolwide Planning***

A school with a poverty rate of 40 percent or more may operate under Title I as a Schoolwide Project. Schools using this model have a great deal of flexibility regarding use of Title I funds but also more responsibility for comprehensive planning and overall school improvement. The law (section 1114 (b) (1) (A)) requires that a schoolwide program include a comprehensive needs assessment of the entire school, including the needs of migrant students, based on information that includes how students are meet the state's challenging academic content and achievement standards.

A needs assessment for schoolwide project planning purposes must consider student achievement. One method to review student achievement data is a data retreat, where teachers review test scores to determine general academic needs and strengths of students by grade and subject, and analyze test items to identify needs for changes in the curriculum or instructional methods.

A schoolwide program must also include schoolwide reform strategies to address the needs of all students, and plans for:

- timely and effective support for students not yet proficient;
- attracting and retaining highly qualified teachers,
- high quality professional development,
- involvement of teachers in decision making,
- transitions between preschool and kindergarten, and
- parent involvement

For more information see Guideline 17a on Schoolwide Projects.

## ***Needs Assessment and Targeted Assistance Programs***

The law (section 1115 (a)) says that a school operating with the Targeted Assistance model may only use Title I funds for programs that provide services to eligible children and defines eligible children as those

“identified by the school as failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet the state’s challenging student academic achievement standards on the basis of multiple, educationally related, objective criteria established by the local educational agency and supplemented by the school, except that children from preschool through grade 2 shall be selected solely on the basis of such criteria as teacher judgment, interviews with parents, and developmentally appropriate measures.”

In a targeted assistance school needs assessment is both the process of determining the overall grades and subjects where the greatest academic deficits exist, and then identifying the children most in need of academic support services. The process might include a data retreat to analyze overall academic performance, surveys of teachers and parents, and comparison of school performance to district goals.

**Identifying Students to Serve**—In a Targeted Assistance school the process used to identify eligible students will typically include a review of student assessment data from spring testing, using state, district, or school-developed instruments, as well as teacher observations or parent interviews. The process must be objective and include multiple measures to identify those students most in need and establish a priority list for service. Targeted assistance schools are expected to be able to document the student selection process and evaluate student progress as part of the needs assessment for the next year.

For more information see Guideline 17b—Targeted Assistance Schools.

## ***Resources***

Conducting a Comprehensive Needs Assessment  
(from USDOE's *Implementing Schoolwide Programs—An Idea Book on Planning*  
[http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Idea\\_Planning/Step\\_2.html](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Idea_Planning/Step_2.html)

NCREL Data Primer—an instructional website designed to help educators become more comfortable with thinking about and using data for the purposes of instructional decision making  
<http://www.ncrel.org/datause/dataprimer/>

McREL—A School Change Toolkit <http://www.mcrel.org/toolkit/process/index.asp>

CESA 6—[Districtwide Needs Assessment](#)—a planning tool for a district's consolidated plan under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.